

## Article

# **‘Lancashire accents, Lancashire goods and Lancashire girls’: Localism and the image of the cotton industry in the interwar period**

Southern, Jack

Available at <http://cllok.uclan.ac.uk/17981/>

*Southern, Jack ORCID: 0000-0001-6066-2936 (2017) ‘Lancashire accents, Lancashire goods and Lancashire girls’: Localism and the image of the cotton industry in the interwar period. International Journal of Regional and Local History, 12 (2). pp. 77-91. ISSN 2051-4530*

It is advisable to refer to the publisher’s version if you intend to cite from the work.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/20514530.2017.1400716>

For more information about UCLan’s research in this area go to  
<http://www.uclan.ac.uk/researchgroups/> and search for <name of research Group>.

For information about Research generally at UCLan please go to  
<http://www.uclan.ac.uk/research/>

All outputs in CLoK are protected by Intellectual Property Rights law, including Copyright law. Copyright, IPR and Moral Rights for the works on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. Terms and conditions for use of this material are defined in the [policies](#) page.

Draft Copy

Jack Southern

*University of Central Lancashire, Preston, UK*

[Jsouthern2@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:Jsouthern2@uclan.ac.uk)

# **‘Lancashire accents, Lancashire goods and Lancashire girls’: Localism and the image of the cotton industry in the interwar period**

## **Introduction**

During the interwar years, the realisation that the British cotton industry had lost its global primacy began to challenge the socio-economic system upon which much of Lancashire had been built. Prior to the First World War cotton had still been expanding, and bar some cyclical downturns had remained generally stable.<sup>1</sup> Yet, the combination of dislocation during the war years, the post-war boom and bust, and the economic uncertainty of the 1920s combined with declining global cotton markets to set in motion the industry’s slow and painful decline. Between 1912 and 1930, there was reduction in Britain’s total production of cotton piece goods from 8 million square yards to 3.3 million, whilst the share of world cotton exports underwent a reduction from 68 per cent to 44 per cent.<sup>2</sup> Behind these statistics lay a stark, troubling reality for Lancashire’s cotton towns. The possible solutions to reinvigorate the industry sought to cut costs through streamlining, altering work patterns and increasing competitiveness. Alternative suggestions included the introduction of modern machinery, and automatic looms, but

---

<sup>1</sup> See G. Timmins, *Four Centuries of Lancashire Cotton*, (Lancashire: Lancashire County Books, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> K. Robbins and G. Holmes, *The Eclipse of a Great Power: Modern Britain 1870-1992*, (London: Routledge, 1994), p.142.

radical change was resisted, often due to costs.<sup>3</sup> Some sections of municipal and financial leadership in Lancashire began to explore the ability to diversify local economies and introduce new industries.<sup>4</sup> Divisions amongst communities developed, as resources became tighter, work became characterised by instability and a general malaise set in amongst many cotton communities. Increasingly, narratives of betrayal by employers, municipal leaders and by the government developed.<sup>5</sup> To compound these issues, the industry's reputation suffered domestically from perceptions that it was out-dated and unfashionable, especially in contrast to the increasing use of man-made materials such as rayon, perceived as a 'forward-thinking' alternative.<sup>6</sup>

Although the attempts to respond to regional economic to change was, according to Walton 'low-key' and 'surprisingly passive',<sup>7</sup> there developed from within cotton towns a movement to engage local people in actively saving the industry. More generally, this was part of the civic movement that Wildman shows across the industrial north-west, which served as a way of deflecting attention away economic troubles.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> P. Sunley, 'Marshallian Industrial Districts', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 17, 3 (1992), p. 315.

<sup>4</sup> M. Dupree, *Lancashire and Whitehall: The Diary of Sir Raymond Streat* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987) p. 28,

<sup>5</sup> See for the most famous example E. Canney, *Lancashire Betrayed*, (Manchester: John Heywood ltd, 1930).

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion on the development of the Rayon industry, see J. Harrop 'The Growth of the Rayon Industry in the Inter War Years', *Yorkshire Bulletin of Economic and Social Research*, 1968.

<sup>7</sup> J. Walton, *Lancashire: A Social History, 1558-1939*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), p. 326.

<sup>8</sup> C. Wildman, 'Urban Transformation in Liverpool and Manchester 1918-1939', *Historical Journal*, 55, 1, (03), (2012), p. 142.

Similarly, as Philo and Kearns have described, this tactic of ‘subtle socialisation’,<sup>9</sup> by shifting local focus towards a visible statement of action local authorities became a vital tool in promoting the industrial north. This civic movement combined with the growing desire to utilise ‘propaganda’ from within the industry, with the intention to ‘secure the immediate expansion of trade in cotton goods in the home market, but also establish a foundation on which an ever increasing goodwill for cotton can be fostered.’<sup>10</sup> In part, the attempts to change the image of Lancashire cotton symbolised the shift towards ‘business collectivism’, and a collaborative approach that would ultimately result in seismic structural change following the Second World War.<sup>11</sup> Yet the attempts to formulate a combined, industry wide image were fraught with difficulties, as despite the global reach of cotton, it was on a day-to-day basis, local in nature.

This article traces the attempts to promote Lancashire cotton that began from within cotton towns, and combined civic pride with local engagement to challenge the wider depictions of cotton and the county. Regardless of whether these images presented are entirely truthful, they are, as argued by Dellheim, ‘products of historical experience’ that can go on to influence political and economic decision-making’.<sup>12</sup> The aim is therefore to move away from the issue described by EP Thompson in that the image of cotton towns is one where people ‘think first of the industry, and only

---

<sup>9</sup> G. Kearns, and C. Philo, ‘Culture, history, capital: A critical introduction to the selling of places’, *Selling Places: The city as cultural capital, past and present* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1993), p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, May 1, 1930.

<sup>11</sup> See M.W. Kirby, ‘The Lancashire Cotton Industry in the Inter-War Years: A Study in Organizational Change’, *Business History*, 16, 2, (1974), pp. 145-159.

<sup>12</sup> C. Dellheim, ‘Imagining England: Victorian Views of the North’, *Northern History*, 22, 1, (1986), p. 217.

secondly of the people connected to it or serving it.’<sup>13</sup> In doing so, the article expands upon the study of how the images and discourse from the industrial north were part of a movement that was described by Featherstone as occurring during the interwar period, where the characterisation of northerners comprised of the ‘complementary relationship of local northern cultural traditions and emergent national and international movements’. As he discusses in relation to Gracie Fields, the archetypal ‘Lancashire lass’, this comprised of the utilisation of the ‘provincial and ordinary’.<sup>14</sup> Eventually these portrayals would lead to a ‘nationalisable Northernness’ demonstrably drawn from the locality, but different from the rest of Britain.<sup>15</sup> As Richards suggests, this image was, as shown by Fields and George Formby, one of ‘optimism, cheerfulness and indomitability’,<sup>16</sup> and as discussed here, the same tactics were used to promote cotton as a collective, singular entity.

### **Internal and External perceptions**

The negative perception of Northern England’s now former industrial areas is long established issue.<sup>17</sup> Despite the acknowledged global significance of the industrial North, debates were long held over the problems faced by urban populations. Yet, from within the towns themselves, industrial primary elicited great pride through being what Richards

---

<sup>13</sup> E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, (London: Penguin, 2003) p. 192.

<sup>14</sup> S. Featherstone, *Englishness: Twentieth-century Popular Culture and the Forming of English Identity*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), pp. 92-94.

<sup>15</sup> Featherstone, *Englishness*, pp. 92-94.

<sup>16</sup> J. Richards, *Films and British National Identity: from Dickens to Dad’s Army*, (Manchester: Manchester University press, 1997), p. 259.

<sup>17</sup> See D. Russell, *Looking North: Northern England and the National Imagination*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004).

called ‘the industrial heart of Britain and thus of Empire.’<sup>18</sup> For late Victorian and Edwardian cotton towns, especially those in the north east of the Lancashire focussed on export markets, the evolution from handloom to powerloom, still within living memory, and the towns built upon the industry were signs of ‘progress’. Arthur Shadwell argued in his Edwardian period comparison of the industrial populations of Britain, Germany and the United States that:

‘Lancashire and Yorkshire have much reason for self-congratulation. Nowhere has the human race piled up so many great towns within the same area ... in spite of the pride inspired by their magnitude, they have a bad name and are shunned. No one goes near them save for business or to visit friends ... The guide-books dismiss them with the scantest notice, and the few novelists who lay their scenes in them paint them in the gloomiest colours.’<sup>19</sup>

These ‘grim’ images so popular in national consciousness were further developed during periods of industrial decline, often described by travel writings.<sup>20</sup> These portrayals of a region, often alien to external audiences, were as Pearce convincingly argues in the case of George Orwell’s *The Road to Wigan Pier*, ‘exaggerated and fictionalised’,<sup>21</sup> if industrial towns were not altogether avoided, or portrayed as separate from the rural ‘true’ north.<sup>22</sup> The images helped to establish the idea that Warden highlights in that, ““beauty” is not a term that would be associated

---

<sup>18</sup> Richards, *Films and British National Identity*, p. 255.

<sup>19</sup> A. Shadwell, *Industrial Efficiency: A Comparative Study of Industrial Life in England, Germany and America*, (London: Longmans, 1913) p.44

<sup>20</sup> See for example H.V. Morton, *In Search of England*, (London, Meuthen, 1944), G. Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, (London, Penguin, 2001 ed), J.B. Priestley, *English Journey*, (Hammandsworth, Great Northern Books, 2012 ed).

<sup>21</sup> Pearce, ‘Revisiting Wigan Pier’, *History*, 82, 267 (1997), p. 417.

<sup>22</sup> See Russell, *Looking North*, pp. 46-60.

with the 1930s Northern city.’<sup>23</sup> Yet, many of the identities of the North continue to be tied to the industrial townscape. Many towns still bear the physical scars of decline through old industrial buildings, and as Richards has suggested, the wider representations of ‘northernness’ were, and in effect still are ‘essentially urban, industrial, working-class and in many respects nineteenth century.’<sup>24</sup>

The economic success of Lancashire, and particularly cotton, helped create, encourage, and reinforce a sense of pride amongst communities in both their localities and their work.<sup>25</sup> There was the continuation and creation of local activities developed from ‘traditional’ customs that had remained alive in industrial towns, such as rushbearing, and Wakes Week celebrations, fairs and festivals, co-opted by a plurality of identity groups.<sup>26</sup> These events could evolve to transcend their original function and meaning. In Preston, for example the local Guild Festival held every twenty years since 1762 gradually incorporated cotton into processions, exhibitions, and tableaux. In doing so, these events reiterated shared communal experiences.<sup>27</sup> The Burnley Fair for example dated from 1294, but evolved to be a wider civic celebration that linked the

---

<sup>23</sup> C. Warden, ‘Ugliness and Beauty: the Politics of Landscape in Walter Greenwood’s *Love on the Dole*’, *New Theatre Quarterly*, 29, (2013), pp. 35-47.

<sup>24</sup> J. Richards, Foreword, in Russell, *Looking North*, p. ix.

<sup>25</sup> Richards, *Films and British National Identity*, p. 253.

<sup>26</sup> See multiple examples in books of folklore and custom. For example, John Roby, *The Traditions of Lancashire*, (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1829).

<sup>27</sup> For a history of the Preston Guild, see R.D. Parker, ‘The Changing Character of Preston Guild Merchant’, 1762- 1862, *Northern History*, 20, 1, (1984), pp. 108-126.



town's past to its present.<sup>28</sup> Like the rest of Britain, the county also underwent a renaissance in pageantry through the Edwardian period,<sup>29</sup> and this too had locational specific elements. This understanding of 'history' was a vital element of urban character, but also as Walton and Poole have traced in the case of Wakes Weeks, was also a form of commercialisation in the promotion of the industrial town. As well as serving as a unifying motif, the utilisation of a shared past reiterated the centrality of cotton to everyday life. Such actions were further encouraged, as Hobbs has shown, through the local press, who similarly shared this collective effort to define and promote local identities.<sup>30</sup>

The cotton industry was fragmented. Localisation and specialisation between processes, cloths and the selling and marketing of goods placed the emphasis on individual firms within localities.<sup>31</sup> The sectional nature of the cotton industry coupled with the role of individual agents and merchants meant that marketing was generally detached from the everyday practicalities. The 'commercial men', centred on the

---

<sup>28</sup> For a discussion on the traditions of Wakes Weeks, See Walton and Poole, 'The Lancashire Wakes in the Nineteenth Century' in R. Stoch, *Popular Culture and Custom in Nineteenth-century England*, (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 100-125.

<sup>29</sup> For a discussion of the significance of pageantry, see M. Freeman, 'Splendid Display; Pompous Spectacle': historical pageants in Twentieth-Century Britain, *Social History*, 38, 4, (2013), pp. 423-455.

<sup>30</sup> See A. Hobbs, 'Reading the Local Paper: Social and Cultural Functions of the Local Press in Preston, Lancashire, 1855-1900', Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Central Lancashire, 2011.

<sup>31</sup> For a discussion of the system of marketing and selling cotton, see S. Chapman, *The Lancashire Cotton Industry*, (Manchester: Sharratt and Hughes, 1904), pp. 113-144.

Manchester exchange directed sales domestically and overseas.<sup>32</sup> As such, the lack of a sophisticated marketing approach for the cotton industry meant that alongside the protection offered through the British Empire, which stymied foreign competition, there was little need for a collective marketing strategy in any serious sense, and even less need to focus energies on the domestic market for those sections reliant upon exports. The lack of promotion undertaken domestically prior to the interwar period has meant that the attempt to piece together a coherent industry-wide survey is difficult. Marrison, Broadberry and Leunig have argued that the success of the long established merchant and agent system for selling textiles abroad probably extended the years of British dominance in cotton, but also encouraged the maintenance of this sectional separation.<sup>33</sup> In his discussion of the post-Second World War period, Clayton has highlighted the role of Cotton Board (CCB) in formulating a collective strategy in the face of decline.<sup>34</sup> However, the lack of an effective central body throughout the interwar years, coupled with the resentment from some sections of the industry over the actions of the CCB during the First World War has meant that previous attempts at a coherent industry-wide promotional campaign were generally piecemeal.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> For a discussion of the wider influence that the cotton merchants had on wider Lancastrian society, see Walton, *Lancashire*, pp. 208-210.

<sup>33</sup> T. Leunig, A. Marrison, and S. Broadberry, 'Selling English Cotton into the World Market: Implications for the Rationalisation Debate 1900 – 1939' In: J. Wilson, (ed.) *King Cotton: A Tribute to Douglas A. Farnie*, (Lancaster: Carnegie Publishing Ltd, 2009), pp. 39-58.

<sup>34</sup> See D. Clayton, 'Buy British: The Collective Marketing of Cotton Textile, 1956-1962', *Textile History*, 41, 2 (2010), pp. 217-235.

<sup>35</sup> See Hubert Henderson's history of the Cotton Control Board and the agitation against it in H. Henderson, *The Cotton Control Board*, (London: Clarendon, 1922).

The status of the cotton operative, that in conventional terms was semi-skilled,<sup>36</sup> had through the successes of the industry developed in some sections into a privileged position at odds with the state of cotton markets. By 1914, for example, the towns of Nelson, Brierfield and Barrowford had around 75 per cent of their workforces engaged in weaving, and as Hill argues, through the security of a combined family wage a ‘sense of importance and self-confidence.’<sup>37</sup> More generally, Lancastrian cotton men were famous across the country for their self-belief, laissez-faire attitudes, and bullishness to ‘outside’ interference.<sup>38</sup> Even in 1928, the economist Ethel Dietrich wrote of how, much to the detriment of the industry, the cotton mind-set had ‘acquired a proud tradition which is shared by employers, investors and operatives who have with their ancestors been born and bred in the industry. Nowhere have the shibboleths of laissez faire clung with such persistence until Lancashire individualism has become a byword’.<sup>39</sup>

The self-belief amongst cotton towns helped to encourage municipal rivalries. Historically this had helped to ‘humanise industrialisation’ in Caunce’s view, but additionally, it meant a strengthening of bonds between populations, localities, and industry, as towns and cities were proud of and sought to express their local successes.<sup>40</sup> For example, it has long been a source of contention that both Blackburn and Burnley,

---

<sup>36</sup> Turner in fact terms weaving an ‘open’ trade. See H.A. Turner, *Trade Union Growth, Structure and Policy: A Comparative Study of the Cotton Unions* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1962), Chapter 3.

<sup>37</sup> J. Hill, *Nelson: Politics, Economy, Community*, (Lancaster: Carnegie, 1997), p. 28.

<sup>38</sup> See P. Ward, *Britishness Since 1870*, (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 68-70.

<sup>39</sup> Ethel Dietrich, ‘The Plight of the Lancashire Cotton Industry’, *American Economic Review*, 18, 3, (1928), p. 470.

<sup>40</sup> See S. Caunce, ‘Northern Industrial Towns, Rivals or Partners?’, *Urban History*, 30, 3, (2003), p. 353.

each self-identified as the 'weaving capital of the world'. Additionally, industrial confidence manifested through the architecture across the towns and villages of the north. In the case of Bolton for example, despite having a 'fine heritage dating back beyond the Industrial Revolution' the buildings that continue to dominate the town, according to Hyde and Clayton are those that 'bear witness to the ambition and achievements of the inventors, industrialists and merchants of this northern town.'<sup>41</sup> Shadwell again highlights this municipal pride by suggesting that: 'The extension of the area covered by bricks and mortar and the increased number of people massed in them is always proudly quoted as the first and incontrovertible proof of local progress.'<sup>42</sup>

Caunce best frames the municipal competition through a trans-Pennine analysis, by arguing that the towns of the industrial north of England were 'too economically integrated by trade to ignore each other' but most significantly that they provided an encouraging environment for industry to flourish without any real central authority directing actions.<sup>43</sup> Primarily this meant a lack of one population centre serving as a regional 'focal point' that dominates others, and resistance to anywhere trying to serve as such.

### **The movement to promote cotton**

Localism and sectionalism remained key principles amongst cotton towns even after the First World War. Despite the growing interest in propaganda from various fields and

---

<sup>41</sup> J. Hyde and D. Clayton, 'Out and About in Bolton: Industrial Revelation'. *Historian*, 109, 3, (2011), pp. 28-31.

<sup>42</sup> Shadwell, *Industrial Efficiency*, p. 43.

<sup>43</sup> Caunce, *Rivals*, p. 20.

other domestic industries,<sup>44</sup> such as were developed during First World War,<sup>45</sup> and through the Empire Marketing Board,<sup>46</sup> the cotton industry was slow to act, and generally unenthusiastic.<sup>47</sup> For example, merchants in Manchester declined exhibits at the British Industries Fair in both 1925 and 1928, and several times declined requests from the spinning section of the industry to engage in promotional activities.<sup>48</sup> As suggested by Redford, the Manchester Chamber of Commerce did not object to members promoting cotton goods, but did not want to be actively involved in it, and condemned the idea of collective advertising.<sup>49</sup>

Several figures argued for a collective approach to promoting cotton. The activities of Edgar Ashworth, a cloth manufacturer from Appley Bridge, for example featured heavily in the regional press.<sup>50</sup> Despite the support he gained from the press,

---

<sup>44</sup> For the development of propaganda, see G. Messinger, *British Propaganda and the State in the First World War*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992).

<sup>45</sup> For the development of Propaganda and Public Relations, See J. L'Etange, 'State Propaganda and Bureaucratic Intelligence: The Creation of Public Relations in 20th century Britain', *Public Relations Review*, 24, 4, (1998), pp. 413-441.

<sup>46</sup> See for the role of propaganda in instigating international markets, W.R. Garside, *British Unemployment 1919-1939: A Study in Public Policy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 148-155. Also S. Constantine, 'The Buy British Campaign of 1931', *European Journal of Marketing*, 21, 4, (1987), p. 47.

<sup>47</sup> D. Clayton, 'Marketing Cotton Textiles', *Textile History*, 41, 2, (2010) p. 220.

<sup>48</sup> A. Redford, *Manchester Merchants and Foreign Trade: 1850-1939*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1934), p. 220.

<sup>49</sup> Redford, *Manchester Merchants*, p. 220.

<sup>50</sup> Ashworth proposed a scheme in 1927 that he continued to promote across the county for several years. His plan was centred upon an industry wide cooperative approach, including the establishment of central office next to the Manchester Exchange to direct marketing, the production of publications mailed to buyers giving information on manufacturing firms, a network of agents working and reporting on conditions in foreign countries and a centralised approach to marketing goods domestically and abroad. He later advocated the

particularly the *Manchester Guardian*, he struggled to get the disparate groups of the industry to move past sectionalism<sup>51</sup>

A fragmented interest grew amongst the disparate elements of the industry, and Ashworth was part of a rising number cotton-interest groups promoting the industry, and encouraging the use of propaganda. Although there were small scale events in various towns, It was not until the assembly of the International Cotton Manufacturers' and Spinners' Association held in Barcelona, in November 1929, that a directive, issued by Arno Pearse, called for every nation with an interest in the cotton industry to form a Cotton Propaganda Committee.<sup>52</sup> Pearse was a globally respected authority on cotton and expert on labour. The role of these committees, he envisioned, would be to direct domestic promotional activities that would range from local competitions, to dances and balls, as well as a 'national cotton week' to attract public attention.<sup>53</sup>

There was a change in emphasis to target the domestic market as well as recapturing those abroad, and this mirrored the shift in governmental economic policy.<sup>54</sup> Previous campaigns to target the domestic market had received varying degrees of

---

establishment of around sixty 'foreign agencies' to display goods and offer information on the industry, based on his analysis of foreign textile industries. *Manchester Guardian*, April 13, 1927, and January 16, 1929.

<sup>51</sup> Attendees included the Federation of Master Cotton Spinners' Association, the Cotton Spinners' and Manufacturers' Association, and the Cotton Yarn Association, as well as the United Textile Factory Workers Association, comprising of all of the operative unions. The invitation to attend was declined by the Bleachers, Printers, Dyers and Finishers. *Manchester Guardian*, January 16, 1929

<sup>52</sup> In May 1930, The International Cotton Committee established a propaganda fund. *Lancashire Evening Post*, May 8, 1930.

<sup>53</sup> Lancashire Record Office/ DDX116/6/4.

<sup>54</sup> For a discussion of the establishment of the home market and work of the Empire Marketing Board, see J.A. Moore , 'Selling Empire: A Historical Perspective On Selling Foreign Products In Domestic Markets', *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing*, 8, 2, (2016), pp. 263 – 283.

enthusiasm from the cotton areas. In the weaving districts, a great deal of scepticism had long existed to diverting attention away from exports, and various local figures such as later Chancellor of the exchequer Philip Snowden severely criticised the effect such initiatives would have on international trade.<sup>55</sup> However, collective effort was the focus, eventually culminating in the 'Buy British Campaign' of 1931. But, as Constantine highlights, the change in mentality placed the responsibility for Britain's economic recovery upon citizens.<sup>56</sup> The spirit Pearse encouraged had some domestic foundation in civic celebrations. In Manchester particularly, the city began to combine the promotion of cotton with its own forms of engagement. The Civic Week held in from October 2<sup>nd</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> 1926, for example, served as an opportunity to attract international businesses, but was also an attempt to smooth over relations between municipal powers and local communities.<sup>57</sup> It featured pageants, and, at the request of the *Manchester Guardian*, a textile exhibition held at the Belle Vue. This approach stimulated civic pride, and moved the public focus from local economic turbulence toward one of unity, confidence and economic strength as a form of 'boosterism'.<sup>58</sup> The views of the local authorities, with which the *Manchester Guardian* agreed, typified the continued bullishness of Lancashire cotton, when it argued that 'there has been far too much crying down of the Lancashire cotton trade ... any other nation possessing such a

---

<sup>55</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, November 3, 1926.

<sup>56</sup> Constantine, *Buy British*, p. 56.

<sup>57</sup> T. Hulme, 'A Nation of Town Criers': Civic Publicity and Historical Pageantry in Inter-War Britain. *Urban History*, 44, 2 (2016), pp. 279.

<sup>58</sup> See P. Larkham and K. Lilley, 'Plans, planners and city images: place promotion and civic boosterism in British reconstruction planning', *Urban History*, 30, 2, (2003), pp. 183-205.

business would regard it as prodigious, and Manchester does right in bringing its record into prominence'.<sup>59</sup>

The messages conveyed reflected the emotional ties that some operatives had to the industry. The aim was to show the country, and indeed the world, that new, modern lines were being produced at affordable prices, to reverse the negative, out-dated reputation of Lancashire's cotton goods, and to 'secure the immediate expansion of trade in cotton goods in the home market, but also establish a foundation on which an ever increasing goodwill for cotton can be fostered.'<sup>60</sup> One of the first attempts at doing this was to promote cotton goods amongst the operatives themselves by likening the wearing of silk shirts to a betrayal of the industry.<sup>61</sup> Fred Holroyd, President of the Federation of Master Cotton Spinners perhaps best vocalised how the local and national could combine in 1930 when he argued that 'Lancashire ... has been modest for too long ... It is no longer sufficient to be skilful ... the prize goes today to the loudest voice and brightest print.'<sup>62</sup>

### **From the local to the regional**

The spirit for collective effort tentatively grew into further experiments for promoting Lancashire cotton. Although the events relied on the actions of localities, there was a dual movement of local initiatives and wider Manchester centric activities. To coincide with the British Industries Fair in London and Birmingham, Manchester held the

---

<sup>59</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, October 2, 1926.

<sup>60</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, May 1, 1930.

<sup>61</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, October 22, 1929.

<sup>62</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, May 1, 1930.



Lancashire Cotton Fair in February 1930 at City Hall, Deansgate. It was hoped that the event would serve as ‘jumping off ground for a more ambitious campaign of publicity,’<sup>63</sup> and it toured to other towns, specifically in the north, over the following months.<sup>64</sup> Lord Privy Seal, J.H. Thomas declared how the intention was to ‘show the world that the old skill, craft and perfection associated with the cotton industry is not lost.’<sup>65</sup> According to the advertisements featured in national newspapers, the fair was ‘an educative, fascination and comprehensive exhibition showing Lancashire’s staple industry from the raw cotton to the finished product.’<sup>66</sup> The involvement of the Manchester based *Daily Dispatch*, which boasted readership of 414,000 in March 1929, added further promotional opportunity through the utilisation of photographic reportage, whilst further legitimacy was lent by the opening ceremony being performed by J.R Clynes, the Home Secretary, and former cotton operative.<sup>67</sup> The fair was intended to be the start of a wider collaboration across the industry, but was also significant in reiterating the significance of Lancashire. It was suggested that in undertaking the activities, Lancashire again ‘led the way’ over international rivals

Alongside the fair, and in the hope of building upon the interest that was generated, various towns proposed to run concurrent activities as a promotional aid and to build toward a National Cotton Week to be held in May, 1930. Some towns took to

---

<sup>63</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, February 21, 1930.

<sup>64</sup> For example, for three days in Nelson during March 1930.

<sup>65</sup> *Manchester Evening Post*, January 31, 1930.

<sup>66</sup> Such advertisements featured in local publications across the country.

<sup>67</sup> Cited in R. Conway, ‘Modernity and popular cultures of Holiday making in 1930s Blackpool,’ unpublished PhD dissertation, Manchester University, (2011), p. 132. Also ‘Making the Millgirl Modern’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 24, 4 (2013).

the opportunity with great enthusiasm, but others, primarily in the export focussed weaving section did not. Whereas Lytham St Annes for example chased involvement partially in rivalry with Blackpool,<sup>68</sup> and places like Stockport undertook a range activities, Blackburn decided that its week would not feature a pageant as it 'would require a great deal of organising and that its success would be largely dependent on the weather.'<sup>69</sup> In Burnley, the local Chamber of Commerce decided against sponsoring a local cotton week, feeling that it would be of little benefit or interest to the town.<sup>70</sup>

In Preston, a committee formed of people with an interest in the local cotton industry with the proposal to host various activities. The culmination was the Preston Cotton Shopping Week 3<sup>rd</sup>-12 April 1930, featuring competitions, a tableaux showing the uses of cotton, special offers, balls, and pageants. The approach of involving all of the town's shops, rewarding people for wearing cotton and for utilising local identity was a key tactic in instigating a 'civic movement' in the town. Sixty-six traders entered the 'best window' competition with the prize of a silver cup.<sup>71</sup> Local advertisements used the slogan 'cotton on to cotton', with the Preston Drug Company advertising surgical bandages by declared that they 'cotton'd on to the idea of the Festival in a spirit of loyalty to our Town and County.'<sup>72</sup> Whilst shop 'The Bon' asked people to 'Support Lancashire Industries'.<sup>73</sup> Robinson's meanwhile asked people to 'Support Preston workers by buying cotton goods made in our own town.'<sup>74</sup>

Such was the positivity generated within Preston, the town became a de-facto mentor to other regional municipal groups.<sup>75</sup> In the aftermath, local advertisements

---

<sup>68</sup> LRO/ DDX/1116/6/5.

<sup>69</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, February 5, 1930.

<sup>70</sup> *Burnley News*, May 24, 1930.

<sup>71</sup> LRO/ DDX 1116/6/5.

<sup>72</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, April 8, 1930.

<sup>73</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, April 4, 1930.

<sup>74</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, April 4, 1930.

<sup>75</sup> LRO/DDX/111/6/6/5.

witnessed the promotion of local pride, with declarations that ‘Preston leads the world’ in cotton goods featuring heavily in the press.<sup>76</sup> Such was the success, a further cotton festival to be held July 7<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> 1930. The activities for this included similar activities to the Shopping Week, but also included mill inspections, and the election of Preston’s Cotton Princess.

Outside of the town, there grew desire for a larger, coordinated event across the county. An organising committee containing representatives of all sections of the cotton industry, as well as ancillary ones such as the Drapers and Retail Distributors Association began to officially plan for the National Cotton week at a meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> March 1930. Inspired by similar national weeks in Germany and USA,<sup>77</sup> the group was partially steered by Raymond Streat, at the time secretary of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce, and Fred Holroyd, President of the Federation of Master Cotton Spinners Association. The Week commenced on May 5<sup>th</sup>, 1930, and was acknowledged as the first attempt at mass marketing within the cotton industry.<sup>78</sup> Firms and organisations from across the country were asked for contributions to ‘defray the inconsiderable costs of national propaganda.’<sup>79</sup> For example, Blackpool Corporation, reliant on the cotton industry to sustain its stream of holidaymakers, donated £6,000 taken from Blackpool rates.<sup>80</sup> Other funds came from government and business donations.

Part of the focus of the week emphasized the distinctiveness of Lancashire and of its cotton towns, but also of the growing need to focus attention outside of the region.

---

<sup>76</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, March 6, 1930.

<sup>77</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, April 4, 1930.

<sup>78</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, May 1, 1930.

<sup>79</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, April 4, 1930.

<sup>80</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, May 5, 1930.

Former Prime Minister and Liberal Party leader David Lloyd George stressed at the opening luncheon in Fleet Street how cotton needed to be more fashionable, but also how ‘Manchester is the place to do things, London is the place to show them off.’ He encouraged mills to ‘bring some of the most attractive Lancashire lassies here dressed in your best material, and show how much better they look arrayed in the glory of the products of your mills’.<sup>81</sup> Further support for the Cotton Week came through a series of high-profile figures and celebrities praising Lancashire emphasising these messages. Female MPs, most notably Ellen Wilkinson, and the wives of male MPs, declared that they would wear ‘Lancashire cotton frocks’ for the week in the commons to reiterate the national significance of the event.<sup>82</sup>

The week was a success, with estimates of up to 20,000 shops taking part, <sup>83</sup> and continued for several years. The reach of the event covered the length of Britain, as the industry said ‘good-bye to pessimism’. Collectively, people were encouraged to aid the week by ‘lending a hand, or a window’, and a series of initiatives launched such as a national best dress competition, and specifically targeted discounts.<sup>84</sup> Despite the spread of advertisements, and the warmly received activities across the country, criticisms were raised that the event was too Manchester centric. Similarly, the levels of enthusiasm from the weaving districts was again inconsistent. Overall, the effect though, was a redoubling of efforts on multiple spheres. Firstly, the fight to promote Lancashire cotton goods became more practical by moving the frontline to highstreets as well as in

---

<sup>81</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, May 2, 1930.

<sup>82</sup> *Burnley Express*, May 3, 1930.

<sup>83</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, May 5, 1930.

<sup>84</sup> *Manchester Guardian* May 5, 1930.

utilising exhibitions. Secondly, as several towns organised activities to support the growing cotton effort, local pride was utilised, through civic and municipal buildings becoming a focal point of events such as balls and mannequin parades. The utilisation of these buildings both added a degree of legitimacy to the activities, but also reinforced the connection between the town and the industry.

### **Towards a National Approach**

The National Cotton Week served to renew a sense of industrial pride in Lancashire towns, whilst also engaging the rest of the country in the importance of the cotton industry. Promotional activities thus began to exist in two spheres, the internal, in local Lancashire towns, and the external, across the rest of the country. This was further emphasized by the utilisation of the British Royal Family in promoting goods (Figure 1). As a sign of this new mind set, activities outside of the county sought to ‘take’ Lancashire to the rest of the country, whilst those internally served the purpose of being concurrently celebratory of the past and forward looking. Yet there remained uncertainty over the methods for promoting cotton goods, and a fear that exhibitions would lack effectiveness outside of the county.

The first real push to take the Lancastrian messages out of the county was the 1931 the Cotton Textile Exhibition held at White City, London. The event was organised in conjunction with the British Industries Fair, devised as a collective effort between the Department of Overseas Trade and the Chamber of Commerce, which provided funds alongside various other concerned bodies within the cotton industry.<sup>85</sup> The aim was to reinforce, and build upon the positive messages emanating from

---

<sup>85</sup> Streat, *Lancashire and Whitehall*, p. 5.

Lancashire and to ‘show the retail trade buyer at home and abroad the great variety of cotton’s finished products’.<sup>86</sup> Attitudes toward the exhibition varied, but were often sceptical, and industrial relations at an all-time low in certain districts engaged in the more looms dispute.<sup>87</sup> To help combat this, Edgar Ashworth was engaged as a canvasser.<sup>88</sup>

Raymond Streat was originally against the idea, of the Cotton Textile Exhibition at White City, describing it as a ‘white elephant’, due to cost fears and the lack of a wider, general interest.<sup>89</sup> Some of these fears were inbuilt within the travelling Lancastrians. *The Lancashire Daily Post* correspondent noted how ‘the White City at best is a long rambling place and it has no claims to beauty. Indeed one problem has been to hide its ‘ugliness’.<sup>90</sup> Streat’s apprehension continued up until the day before the exhibition was to open, describing the ‘appalling disorder of the show’.<sup>91</sup> The attempts to drum-up wider interest in the exhibition was equally chaotic, as rumours spread of an appearance by Charlie Chaplin, bringing crowds of around 5,000 people. However, he failed to arrive, with reports suggesting his preference was to visit in an unofficial capacity.<sup>92</sup> The rumour did manage to have a positive effect on sales, with one firm apparently selling ‘as much fabric as two mills could produce in the next six months’,

---

<sup>86</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, November 19, 1930

<sup>87</sup> Raymond Streat believed that the intervention of Lord Derby toward the efforts of the exhibition was a deciding factor in the Employers calling off the strike action. *Lancashire and Whitehall*, p. 25.

<sup>88</sup> DDX1116/6/5.

<sup>89</sup> Streat, *Lancashire and Whitehall*, p. 5.

<sup>90</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, February 16, 1931.

<sup>91</sup> Streat, *Lancashire and Whitehall*, p. 26.

<sup>92</sup> Rumours persisted that Chaplin had wanted to attend in an unofficial capacity rather than offering a celebrity endorsement.

despite serving as an anti-climax for many attendees.<sup>93</sup> Attendance figures for the exhibition estimated around 3,000 people per day visiting, with many coming from abroad.<sup>94</sup>

The exhibition was more significant in moving the efforts away from a Lancastrian image, being described as, 'Britain's response to pessimists.'<sup>95</sup> Yet, the displays proudly boasted their district of origin. Stands and displays came from towns, sections of the industry, and trade unions. The manufacturing section had the prime position, utilising mannequins. Towns took great pride in being part of the exhibition, and reverted to municipal competition to be the best display. The local organising committee for Preston, for example, made a conscious effort to better rival towns, but also to gather momentum locally as a source of civic pride. They launched a series of events in the town to increase interest across the outlying areas and to forge a collective 'Preston district' identity.<sup>96</sup> Preston was noted as utilising the commercial possibilities of the display. As shown in Figure 2, both the name of the district, and town's coat of arms were central features of Preston's display. Blackpool's display equally used local symbolism, and featured the beachfront as a background, as well as silver miniatures of the Blackpool Tower, and a chart of places of interest.<sup>97</sup> Another display created an 'old suburban garden' out of cotton handkerchiefs.<sup>98</sup> The review of the event in the *Lancashire Evening Post* emphasized how: 'All was Lancashire at the Cotton Exhibition. Lancashire accents, Lancashire goods and Lancashire girls ... how they

---

<sup>93</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, February 27, 1931.

<sup>94</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, February 19, 1931.

<sup>95</sup> *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, February 17, 1931

<sup>96</sup> For the full record of the Preston Cotton Festival Committee, see LRO/ DDX/1116/6/5.

<sup>97</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, February 16, 1931.

<sup>98</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, February 17, 1931.

harvested the Southerners and the overseas buyer's brass!' <sup>99</sup> Likewise, a sense of place emanated from the companies and news reporters travelling to the exhibition. The *Lancashire Evening Post* for example referred to the crowds in derisory tones as 'the Southerner'.

The Lancashire on show at the Textile Exhibition, and increasingly widely, was rooted in a marketable form of localism, and presented a heroic image of both the county and the cotton industry. Internally, the promotional activities were increasingly celebratory and positive and the emphasis on history was embellished on a much grander scale. There was the incorporation of other 'traditional' 'British' events such as Morris dancing, and scout rallies alongside pageants mixing regional history with modern advancements. The image of Lancashire became increasingly complex – industrial, but with links to an archaic rurality, modern, but still comprising of 'traditional' dancing and activities. <sup>100</sup> The largest example, in terms of sheer size, was the 1932 the Lancashire Cotton Pageant held at Belle Vue in Manchester. It was the largest open-air event that the country had attempted at the time. The pageant offered 'a series of spectacles' which ranged from 'illusion and symbolism' to 'historical pageantry'. <sup>101</sup> It included a cast of 12,000, and as Hulme has argued, the 'narrative created a both allegorical and literal story of cotton', featuring vignettes from

---

<sup>99</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, February 17, 1931.

<sup>100</sup> Indeed, the activities associated with the old customs of rushbearing underwent if not a renaissance, at least an increased presence. The most famous example was the Britannia Coconutters of Rossendale, who underwent a revival in the 1920s. See *English Dance and Song*, 45-48, (1983) p. 24.

<sup>101</sup> *The Times*, June 27, 1932.



throughout a global history of cotton cultivation and trade.<sup>102</sup> Significantly, it showed the 'long history of trials and difficulties' as an allegory for the contemporary situation.<sup>103</sup> Much like Cannadine's discussion of other civic festivals, the message behind such an outward display of unity was symbolic: Lancashire and Britain was, as it always had been, ready for the fight ahead.<sup>104</sup>

### **The Cotton Queen and Lancastrian character**

The sense of otherness and self-importance from the cotton industry reached crescendo with the *Daily Dispatch's* Cotton Queen Quest that ran from 1930 until the outbreak of the Second World War curtailed promotional activities. The image and messages of the cotton queens reiterated the developing portrayal of a marketable northern identity that spread into several different media. Conway has discussed the competition in the context of modernity, and whilst certain aspects were genuinely innovative, the approach taken was a culmination of the activities that had been undertaken locally, but now amplified and with a collective purpose.<sup>105</sup> The involvement of the *Daily Dispatch* also reinforced the visual imagery attached to the event and, like Fowler suggests: 'many employers bulk-bought the newspaper if one of their employees were entered.'<sup>106</sup> Moreover, the competition served as a symbolic gesture of the unification of the cotton industry across the county.

---

<sup>102</sup> Hulme, *A Nation of Town Criers*, p. 14.

<sup>103</sup> "Lancashire Cotton Pageant" and 2 pages of cuttings (3 December 1931), Virtual Belle Vue, <http://www.chethams.org.uk/bellevue/items/show/2904>, Accessed 1/4/2017.

<sup>104</sup> D. Cannadine, 'The Transformation of Civic, Ritual In Modern Britain: The Colchester Oyster Feast', *Past and Present*, 94, (1982).

<sup>105</sup> Conway, *Making the Mill Girl Modern*, pp. 518-541.

<sup>106</sup> A. Fowler, *Cotton Operatives and Work*, (Oxford: Routledge, 2001), p. 42.

The idea for region-wide search for a ‘queen’ to represent the industry was first discussed seriously in March 1930, at a joint meeting between various cotton representatives and the Blackpool Corporation to ascertain what involvement the industry could have in the annual June festivities in Blackpool to make them as ‘spectacular as possible’.<sup>107</sup> Cotton was to have a central role in promoting the attractions in Blackpool and serve as the link between the past and contemporary Britain. To signify the balance between the three, a special stamp was produced and used on letters advertising the programme featuring the Blackpool Tower, a girl in a cotton dress and a picture of knights in armour to represent the historical element of the pageants being held.<sup>108</sup> The idea of a ‘Queen’ representing an industry is something common for the period, as queens for even the smallest cause continued to appear for several decades.<sup>109</sup> For example in 1935, Brierfield’s local Cotton Queen was selected and crowned by the reigning local Queen, a Locomotive Queen, an ex-Locomotive Queen, a Rose Queen, the British Legion Benevolent Queen, and six semi-finalists.<sup>110</sup> However, no other industry or competition came close to the success of the Cotton Queen competition. Entry in the competition was restricted to girls working in mills from one of the 18-20 divisions.<sup>111</sup> A girl was nominated from a mill where she then went into a heat, until this was whittled down after undergoing an interview process to

---

<sup>107</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, March 12, 1930.

<sup>108</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, March 12, 1930.

<sup>109</sup> See for example Paul Ward’s interview with the Coal Queen Margaret Lister, [http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/16726/1/Paul\\_Ward\\_Coal\\_Queen\\_edited\\_transcript.pdf](http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/16726/1/Paul_Ward_Coal_Queen_edited_transcript.pdf).

<sup>110</sup> *Burnley Express*, October 2, 1935.

<sup>111</sup> The number of these divisions did change, for example, at one point Nelson was part of the Burnley district, but was later separated.

find a local queen. The competition quickly became more than a simple beauty contest. Although, as the *Lancashire Evening Post* described, districts sent their ‘prettiest mill girl’, the queen would be chosen on ‘her facial beauty, her popularity with her workmates and her charm of manner.’<sup>112</sup> The girls would then move to the crowning ceremony alongside other district’s queens in Blackpool, and a queen would be crowned after ballots had been received through the newspaper, with a cash prize to those who predicted the finishing order. Marjorie Knowles of Nelson, Queen for 1932, described her ‘mission’ upon being welcomed into the House of Commons as making people ‘think cotton, talk cotton and buy cotton’ and that it was her ‘aim to press upon women that for quality, variety and cheapness, Lancashire was best.’<sup>113</sup> Indeed, the same rhetoric was used on other promotional material such as the ‘Cotton Queen’s Plea’ which stressed the benefits of Lancashire goods and appealed for people to purchase them.<sup>114</sup>

The Cotton Queen was indicative of the multi-layered Lancastrian identity. Parallels can be drawn more widely to Gracie Fields first film, *Sally in our Alley* (1931), which featured her character as, ‘unglamorized ... the working girl as heroine, complete with broad Lancashire accent, homely cheerful appearance and breezily good natured manner’ based on ‘decency, forthrightness and commonsense’.<sup>115</sup> Much like Fields, the

---

<sup>112</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, April 16, 1930.

<sup>113</sup> *The Times*, February 23, 1933.

<sup>114</sup> ‘Victoria Hospital Carnival Handbook, 1932’, Marjorie Knowles Collection, held at Burnley Library, Local/LG3 KNOWLES, Marjorie/MAR.

<sup>115</sup> Richards, *Films and British National Identity*, pp. 263-264.

Queens were of their home districts, but became Lancashire's cotton representative to the nation, as well as Great Britain's Cotton Queen.

The local ceremonies were large scale events judged by celebrities and prominent figures regionally, and attracted crowds in the thousands to large scale and prominent venues such as theatres or ballrooms. For a town to be the home of a Cotton Queen was a tremendous civic honour, and the queens often performed ceremonies at local events. When Lois Heath won in 1931, she was cheered by 'thousands of people at Atherton, where the shops and Laburnum mills were decorated in her honour,' and later in the day was taken to Leigh where 'the streets were lined with people'. The Mayor of Leigh said they 'rejoiced that a girl from the Leigh area had been chosen' adding that 'Tyldesley would rejoice because that was her home, Atherton because she worked there, and Leigh because she would be designated "Miss Leigh".'<sup>116</sup> The local press in Burnley eventually referred to the local cotton queens as 'Miss Burnley' and their standing was reflected in higher billing than other local celebrities and MPs at events. Marjorie Knowles even had a range of clothing trademarked and sold using her image, the 'Queen Marjorie' brand, in a similar fashion to the 'Turf Moor' brand linked to Burnley Football Club, by her employers. John Sharples, of Sharples Manufacturers of Nelson, announced with Knowles' coronation in 1932, that her victory had helped cement the friendship of neighbouring towns, as she had been born in Nelson, worked in Brierfield and was crowned Miss Burnley, before becoming Cotton Queen of Great Britain. Sharples 'did not think there was another occasion in history when the Mayors

---

<sup>116</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, June 29, 1931.

and Mayoresses of Burnley, Nelson and Colne had toured the district as they did a few months ago ... being acclaimed by thousands and thousands of people.’<sup>117</sup>

The queens toured the country with an emphasis on northern textile communities, but also met with noted public figures, crossing societal boundaries and epitomising a sense of ‘regality’ with ‘ordinary’, which was a key part of their appeal. Despite the scale of grandeur attached to the event, the impression of the Cotton Queen finalists was one of little pretensions and of an understanding of the importance of the role, representing a ‘fine manifestation of Lancashire common sense.’<sup>118</sup> They were described in interview, over a cup of tea with the *Manchester Guardian* as being ‘as sensible as they are elegant’. The reporter felt that ‘on the whole they prefer their industrial to their royal duties,’ and one of the queens reiterated this by feeling that ‘smiling for two miles ... is a sight harder nor working i’t’h’ mill’. When asked if they had had a good time, one replied, ‘ay, we’ve had a reet good do, but I’d rather be queen of my own time than all of Lancashire’ with one adding that ‘I’d be glad to win for the mills sake.’<sup>119</sup> The use of dialect is especially telling in the portrayal of the contestants, and presentation of an idealised form of mill operative. Eva Lord, the Burnley candidate for 1930, for example was celebrated partly as a sign of the good relationship between the owners and workers at her mill.<sup>120</sup> In contrast, the 1930 Railway Queen, Muriel Brown, did on occasion make politically barbed comment, stating before the cotton queen competition that ‘I hope ... that the queen will find an opportunity of saying

---

<sup>117</sup> *Burnley News*, November 26, 1932.

<sup>118</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, June 20, 1930.

<sup>119</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, June 20, 1930.

<sup>120</sup> *Burnley Express*, May 31, 1930.

something about international and industrial peace. I am a Lancashire girl too ... and I realise how essential it is to have peace in the industries of Lancashire.’<sup>121</sup>

Symbolically, the crowning ceremony was held in Blackpool. As Curzon has argued, 1930s Blackpool acted as a kind of ‘fantasy land’ for the industrial workers, free from the monotony of the industrial town.<sup>122</sup> The wider image of Blackpool also reinforced the significance of Lancashire, and its own sense of self-importance to the wider world. The location was significant, and reiterated both a sense of grandeur and ‘otherness’, whilst The June programme in Blackpool provided holidaymakers, overwhelmingly from cotton towns, with a chance of escapism. ‘The Crowning of the Cotton Queen’, was commissioned and played from the booths along the golden mile, whilst other events such as a 10,000 strong Scout rally, an international swimming gala, and a folk dance festival contributed to grandiose scale of events seen by an estimated 200,000 people.<sup>123</sup> The centrepiece the Pageant of Progress. This was two-mile procession started with a 2000 person, and 100 horse cavalcade passing down Blackpool promenade, which was broken into sections. One showed scenes from English history, a second showing the story of cotton, a collection of motor vehicles and ‘bathing girls’, and ‘the main part of the procession’ devoted to the growth and production of cotton, with the eighteen cotton queen finalists carried on Rickshaws displaying their home districts’ coat of arms.<sup>124</sup>

---

<sup>121</sup> *Lancashire Evening Post*, April 10, 1930.

<sup>122</sup> L. Curzon, ‘Another Place in Time’, *History of Photography*, 35, 3, (2011), pp. 313-326.

<sup>123</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, June 12, 1930.

<sup>124</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, June 20, 1930.

The sense of popularity attached to the Queens and the effect on popular culture was very clear. The 1937 film *Cotton Queen* starring Stanley Holloway and Will Fyfe as rival mill owners brought together by the competition was named so as to utilize the mass marketing possibilities, being that the appeal was ‘particularly strong in Lancashire, for as the title implies it deals with the cotton queen contest.’<sup>125</sup> The main depictions of the characters managed to reinforce many of the propaganda messages, stressing ‘fanatical self-respect’, and the independence of the workers. As shown in the official press book, the film was to utilise on the success of the competition, and the filmmakers were enthusiastic about the potential to secure a box office hit through the popularity of the Cotton Queen Quest, suggesting local queens appear at showings.<sup>126</sup> The film featured the 1936 queen Edna Taylor, who, one reviewer noted ‘practically steals the picture’ and after she delivered a speech, ‘provoked from the trade-show audience a spontaneous roar of applause’.<sup>127</sup>

## Conclusion

The attempts to change the image of the Lancashire cotton industry were at times confused, but rooted in the celebration of everyday life. The relationship between local people and industrial pride is something that has eroded overtime, as cotton mills now stand as reminders of past glories. What the efforts to propagate Lancashire cotton did, was to reiterate the importance of the industry, but also serve as a communal focal point. The actions were cynical, in that, they deflected from the economic and social unrest at the time, but they also helped to shape perceptions of the county to the nation.

---

<sup>125</sup> *Lancashire Daily Post*, November 12, 1937.

<sup>126</sup> Cotton Queens Press Book, BFI Archive, PBS-26738.

<sup>127</sup> *The Era*, May 27, 1937.

From civic celebrations incorporating local industries to the Cotton Queen Quest, the sense of place and pride in the industry was a central facet of living through a declining industry, that communities across the county went through was partially masked by the escapism that these activities provided, whilst at the same time, the reiteration of Lancashire's economic strength provided room for hope. The growing need for propaganda, and the shift towards a central message was a confused one. The industry was at once old and archaic, yet also modern and forward looking. It was also still tied symbiotically to the locality, to civic pride and to local identities.

The eventual decline of Lancashire cotton is usually discussed without consideration for the people who worked in it, and their emotional ties to the workplace that were strengthened through propaganda. The images produced also helped, along with other aspects of popular culture to promote a particular Lancastrian cotton identity distinct from the rest of Britain. This continues to be a rallying point. As, David Quantick argued in the *Telegraph* that 'For decades the north of England has been steeped in a regionalist cliché that, to be honest, it seems quite proud of ... Northerners are rather proud of their reputation. They like to be painted as a bit dour, somewhat unemotional and, let's face it, not southern.'<sup>128</sup>

---

<sup>128</sup> *The Telegraph*, May 20, 2016.